

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 2043

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CSCE, SHUM, UR, US
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SOVIET UNION - OUR ASSESSMENT
IN THE WAKE OF THE FEB 12 PRAVDA ARTICLE

REF: MOSCOW 2042

SUMMARY: THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP BEGAN ITS CURRENT CRACK-
DOWN AGAINST THE ORLOV GROUP, AND HAS NOW RAISED THE QUESTION
OF DISSENT TO THE LEVEL OF FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES IN THE
FEBRUARY 12 PRAVDA ARTICLE, BECAUSE OF A CONFLUENCE OF
SEVERAL TRENDS DEEPLY DISTURBING TO MOSCOW. THESE IN-
CLUDE THE RESURGENCE OF INTERNAL HUMAN RIGHTS DISSENT IN
THE USSR OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, INCREASED WESTERN FOCUS
ON SOVIET INTERNAL AFFAIRS STIMULATED BY THE OVERALL
IMPROVEMENT IN US-SOVIET RELATIONS BEGUN IN 1972 AND
ACCELERATED BY CSCE, THE APPEARANCE OF "CHARTER 77" AND
RELATED EVENTS IN EASTERN EUROPE, PLUS THE COMING TO POWER
OF A US ADMINISTRATION OPENLY COMMITTED TO THE CAUSE OF HUMAN
RIGHTS IN THE USSR AND ELSEWHERE IN THE "SOCIALIST
CAMP." HARASSMENT AND ARREST OF ORLOV GROUP MEMBERS
PROBABLY STEMMED PRIMARILY FROM THE DIRECT AND HIGHLY
EMBARRASSING (FOR MOSCOW) LINK BETWEEN THAT GROUP AND THE
UPCOMING CSCE MEETING IN BELGRADE. WE SEE PRAVDA'S
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TOUGHLY WORDED ARTICLE OF FEBRUARY 12 LARGELY AS A
WARNING TO THE WEST AND PARTICULARLY TO THE US THAT FOR THE
SOVIETS INTERNAL DISSENT MEANS INTERNAL SUBVERSION AND IS NONE
OF THE WEST'S BUSINESS; WE BELIEVE THAT ARTICLE WAS
TRIGGERED BY RECENT ADMINISTRATION STATEMENTS
REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE USSR. IN EFFECT, THE
ISSUE IS NOW FULLY JOINED, WITH THE US AND THE USSR

PUBLICLY TAKING POSITIONS BASED UPON OPPOSING PRINCIPLES.
THERE IS NO QUESTION IN
OUR MINDS THAT THE ISSUE, WITH THE DEEP EMOTIONS IT
STIRS ON BOTH SIDES, CAN BECOME A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK
IN THE PATH OF IMPROVED US-SOVIET RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE KEY QUESTION IN ASSESSING CURRENT SOVIET MOVES
IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD IS WHAT PROBLEM THE SOVIET
LEADERSHIP THINKS IT IS ADDRESSING BY CRACKING DOWN ON
THE ORLOV GROUP AND MOST RECENTLY BY PUBLISHING AN
AUTHORITATIVE AND HARD-HITTING ARTICLE IN PRAVDA FOR
FEBRUARY 12 (SEPTEL). AS WE SEE IT, THE SOVIET
LEADERSHIP FULLY BELIEVES THAT HUMAN RIGHTS WITHIN
THE USSR ARE SOLELY FOR THE CPSU TO DECIDE, ON
THE BASIS OF ITS DISTINCTIVE CONCEPTION OF "SOVIET
SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY." THE LEADERSHIP ALSO BELIEVES THAT
FOR ALL ITS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS, THE USSR REPRESENTS THE
WORLD'S "MOST PERFECT" SOCIAL SYSTEM.

2. DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS SEVERAL DISTURBING
TRENDS HAVE POSED AN INCREASINGLY DIRECT CHALLENGE TO
THESE BELIEFS. IN ROUGH CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, THESE
TRENDS INCLUDE:

--HUMAN RIGHTS DISSENT, REPRESSED IN THE EARLY
1970'S BY A MIX OF HARASSMENT, ARRESTS, AND EXPLUSIONS,
WAS BY 1975 AND 1976 AGAIN ON RISE, WITH THE
RE-EMERGENCE OF THE "CHRONICLE OF CURRENT EVENTS,"
THE CIRCULATION AND PUBLICATION ABROAD OF OTHER
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"SAMIZDAT", SAKHAROV'S RECEIPT OF THE 1975 NOVEL
PEACE PRICE, AND THE FORMATION IN MID-1976 OF A
DISSIDENT GROUP TO MONITOR SOVIET COMPLIANCE WITH
THE HELSINKI FINAL ACT (THE "ORLOV GROUP");
--A SHARPENING WESTERN FOCUS ON SOVIET INTERNAL
AFFAIRS, STIMULATED IN PART BY INCREASED EAST-
WEST CONTACTS THAT ACCOMPANIED THE OVERALL IMPROVE-
MENT IN EAST-WEST RELATIONS BEGUN IN THE EARLY
1970'S, AND ACCELERATED DURING AND AFTER THE CSCE
SUMMIT AT HELSINKI;
--THE APPEARANCE OF "CHARTER 77" IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA
AND NEW MANIFESTATIONS OF INTERNAL DISSENT IN OTHER
EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES;
--THE COMING INTO OFFICE OF A NEW AMERICAN ADMINI-
STRATION COMMITTED TO AND RELATIVELY OUTSPOKEN ABOUT
THE CAUSE OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN FREEDOMS IN THE USSR
AND THE "SOCIALIST CAMP".

3. AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF GROWING CONCERN OVER THE

CHALLENGE THESE TRENDS POSED TO ITS CONVICTIONS REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS, THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP SAW AN INCREASINGLY FIRM LINK BETWEEN ORLOV'S CSCE GROUP AND THE JUNE 1977 BELGRADE MEETING TO REVIEW PROGRESSSS TOWARD FULFILLING THE FINAL ACT. ALTHOUGH MADE UP OF A HANDFUL OF DISSIDENTS, THE ORLOV GROUP WAS TURNING OUT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF HIGHLY EMBARRASSING DOCUMENTS ABOUT SOVIET NON-COMPLIANCE, WAS FORMING NEW CHAPTERS IN THE UKRAINE, LITHUANIA AND GEORGIA, AND WAS INCREASINGLY ATTRACTING THE ATTENTION OF US AND OTHER WESTERN GOVERNMENTS AND NEWS MEDIA. UNDOUBTEDLY MINDFUL OF THE SHORT-TERM COSTS OF A MAJOR CRACK-DOWN AGAINST THE GROUP, THE LEADERSHIP OBVIOUSLY DECIDED THAT THE GROUP'S ACTIVITIES MUST BE DISCREDITED AND HALTED PRIOR TO THE BELGRADE MEETING.

4. IN ADDITION, SOME IN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP PROBABLY ARGUED THAT THE AMERICANS MUST BE SHOWN THAT THEY CANNOT CONFIDENTIAL

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EFFECTIVELY "INTERFERE IN SOVIET INTERNAL AFFAIRS", AND THAT THE DISSIDENTS MUST BE SHOWN THAT THEY ARE NOT IMMUNE FROM SOVIET LAW BECAUSE OF WESTERN PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENTAL OPINION. IN THIS LIGHT, THE AUTHORITATIVE PRAVDA ARTICLE OF FEBRUARY 12 -- WHICH CERTAINLY WAS CLEARED AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL -- REPRESENTS THE OFFICIAL SOVIET RESPONSE TO THE RECENT STATEMENTS BY THE ADMINISTRATION REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE USSR. IT ALSO REPRESENTS A STERN WARNING TO SOVIET DISSIDENTS AS WELL AS TO THEIR SUPPORTERS AND SYMPATHIZERS IN THE USSR.

5. HAVING BEEN INITIALLY ELATED BY THE PUBLIC ADVOCACY OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES, THE DISSIDENTS THEMSELVES NOW TEND -- UNJUSTIFIABLY, BUT PERHAPS UNDERSTANDABLY, FROM THEIR NARROW PERSPECTIVE-- TO BLAME THE WEST AND PARTICULARLY THE UNITED STATES FOR THIS UNFORTUNATE TURN OF EVENTS, BECAUSE OF APERCEIVED BACKING-DOWN BY THE ADMINISTRATION FROM THE DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT ON SAKHAROV. THEY HAVE ONLY A DIM AND OFTEN PAINFULLY NAIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE US POLITICAL SYSTEM AND THE REALITIES OF US-SOVIET RELATIONS, THEY SEE THEMSELVES AS RISKING VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING FOR THE NOBLE CAUSE OF WESTERN IDEALS, IN A STRUGGLE OVERWHELMING ODDS WITH A BRUTAL AND UNJUST SYSTEM. THEY THEREFORE HANG ON EVERY WORD TRANSMITTED VIA WESTERN RADIO BROADCASTS (AND MOSCOW-BASED WESTERN JOURNALISTS) CONCERNING THE ADMINISTRATION'S POSITION IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AREA. AND THROUGH THE HAZE OF THEIR EMOTIONALISM AND MISUNDERSTANDING, THEY NOW FEEL THEY HAVE BEEN LET DOWN.

6. WE THUS FIND OURSELVES AT THE POINT WHERE THE

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE BETWEEN THE US AND THE USSR IS FULLY JOINED. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN A PUBLIC STAND ON PRINCIPLE, AND HAS SPOKEN OUT IN SUPPORT OF SPECIFIC SOVIET DISSIDENTS BRANDED BY THE SOVIET MEDIA AS "ANTI-SOVIET ELEMENTS." AND, WITH THE FEB 12 PRAVDA ARTICLE, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP HAS TAKEN A DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSING PUBLIC STAND, ALSO BASED ON PRINCIPLE. THE HISTORY OF THE JACKSON-VANIK AMENDMENT AND THE BREAKDOWN OF THE RELATED KISSINGER-GROMYKO COMPROMISE SHOW HOW STRONGLY THE POLITBURO FEELS ABOUT WHAT IT REGARDS AS "INTER-FERENCCE IN SOVIET INTERNAL AFFAIRS." IT WAS THEN PRE-PARED TO FORGO MFN AND U.S. CREDITS IN DEFENSE OF THIS PRINCIPLE. THE KREMLIN IS PROBABLY NO LESS DETERMINED NOW TO DEFEND THIS PRINCIPLE AGAINST WHAT IT PERCEIVES AS A NEW CHALLENGE. UNLESS RELIEVED THIS ISSUE CAN BECOME A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK IN THE PATH OF IMPROVED U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS.

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